

April 2016

Hi James,

This really has me and Lori baffled.

<http://www.yoganatomy.com/nutationcounter-nutation/>

Lori said he discussed with you before, and that its counter nutation in backbends (concides with Ray Long), but David Coulter in Anatomy of Hatha Yoga and Monica Gauci said its nutation.

From what I understand, Nutation is the top part of sacrum nodding forward slightly, this will spread the sitting bones and bring the hip bones in.

Counter nutation is the reverse of all that.

I understand that we tilt anterior for forward bend and posterior for backbends but from my reading, the nutate/counter-nutate is the micro movement in the sacroiliac joints which may or may not move same as the pelvis.

So, in Urdhva Dhanurasana, dont we spread the sitting bones and adduct the upper thighs? And does that necessary mean nutate???

Please excuse me if I had got it all mixed up.

I wrote to Monica and she said for me to try and it should be obvious, well, its obvious to me its counter nutate, yet I ground my inner legs and feet and big toes so my back is not jammed, but its not right???

Its an issue that Lori and I encounter often in class, as every students we know have happy duck feet in Urdhva D!!!

Thank you....

Dear Jacquie,

I have David Coulter's book Anatomy of Hatha Yoga in front of me (page 328) and he is very clear, "nutations rotate the promontory of the sacrum anteriorly, and counter-nutations rotate the promontory of the sacrum posteriorly".

David Keil from Yoganatomy is saying the same thing, but in a more complicated (and unclear) way. It is Monica Gauci (Australian Yoga Life magazine article) who is wrong!

What you need to keep in mind, is that the sacrum has independent movement from the hips. That is when the hips are tilted either forwards or backwards, the sacrum can still be moved more on its own.

What David Keil is saying about the hips being in nutation in back bends is correct (to a point). Because when you are in Urdhva Dhanurasana your hips are indeed tilted forwards. However, you are working to tilt them backwards and internally doing the same to the sacrum (i.e. counter-nutation).

David Keil says, "I'm surprised sometimes by how much emphasis is put on this movement happening in backbending type poses when such a small range of motion is possible at the sacroiliac joint." What he fails to appreciate is the pain associated with backbend crunching, when the sacrum is not incorporated.

I fully agree when David Keil says, "It is a good idea to consider all of the factors that go into a backbend and not get caught up in the part that moves the least. A good or deep backbend has much more to do with the hip flexors, such as quadriceps, adductors, and the iliopsoas being open enough to allow the pelvis to move smoothly. When the muscles surrounding the pelvis allow it to move smoothly in backbending, it does not get jammed up in an anterior tilt and compress the lumbar region." However, for the majority of yoga students the truth is that the sacrum does indeed get "jammed up" and when I ask in a class who has back pain in back bends, almost everyone does (if they are not applying counter-nutation).

The students most likely not experiencing backbend pain are the flexible ones. But, this does not mean they are working correctly. It simply means they are open enough in the quadriceps, adductors, iliopsoas and shoulders, so they don't initially have a problem. But they will have a problem eventually if they are not working the sacrum correctly, i.e. active counter-nutation.

Again it is Monica Gauci who is wrong. Yes, it is obvious we need to counter-nutate in backbends, and you clearly feel it. What I think may be happening with Monica is that she is a super bendy person and counter-nutation may not be an issue for her, because she is so open. But, she is still wrong!

Pattabhi Jois (founder of Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga) used to get us to turn our feet out (duck feet) in Urdhva Dhanurasana to reduce the crunching. He had zero clue about the sacrum and nutation/counter-nutation. Monica Gauci is an Ashtangi. From time-to-time I still hear from traveling students that their teacher tells them to turn the feet out. This is bad advice as it increases nutation – exactly the wrong movement.

When you let go of the buttock muscles in backbends, the sacrum nutates automatically to counter the backward movement of the rest of the spine.

If you are still unclear, then try this... working with 3 people. One person in the middle performing Urdhva Dhanurasana. One person at the head end of the body, holding the top of the shoulders, and the other person placing a yoga belt across the front of the hips (just below the iliums) back around the buttocks and up through the legs. Both adjustors are gently pulling at a 45 degree angle. What the yoga belt is doing is counter-nutation and lengthening the rest of the spine – particularly the lumber, which normally gets crunched.

You have heard the saying, "a picture is worth a thousand words" and this applies in this situation as well. You can feel the difference counter-nutation makes in your body, so be confident that this is the right action to advise your students as well.

The goal of Knoff Yoga is to create strong, flexible, healthy, disciplined and independent individuals. I love the fact that you are thinking (and feeling) for yourself and not simply taking the word of the teacher. Well done!

Namaste

James E. Bryan

E.R.Y.T. 500

Program Director & Master Teacher

KNOFF YOGA

Energize, Elevate & Evolve

Phone: + 61 7 4053 5857

Mobile: + 61 (0)41 536 2534

Email: james@knoffyoga.com

Website: www.knoffyoga.com

Postal address:

P.O. Box 975, Edge Hill 4870, Queensland, Australia

Location: Suite 14, 159 - 161 Pease St, Manooora, Cairns QLD 4870

(A.B.N. 18 109 428 864)